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ABSTRACT

A study observed how four boys focused in group literacy activities in a whole language classroom, observed the literacy development of the four boys early in grade 1, and reflected on the teacher's role in class literacy activities. Data included daily journal entries made by the teacher/researcher, copies of students' work, and interviews with the students and their parents. Results indicated that (1) two of the boys sat still and focused on literacy activities as they absorbed information and transferred it to their own literacy development; (2) another boy sat fairly still, but his eyes and mind did not necessarily focus on the task at hand; while (3) the fourth boy's "wriggling" in group activities did not necessarily mean that he was not focused. Findings suggest that teachers cannot assume that because students are fairly still they are necessarily focused, or that because they are wriggling, they are not focused. (Contains 23 references. Appendixes contain observation forms, interview questions, the parent questionnaire, and sample letter identification score sheets.) (RS)

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How Does a Child's Focus in Class Literacy Activities Affect His/Her Literacy Development?

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Classroom Research

by

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1995

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Chapter One

How does a child's focus in class literacy activities affect his/her literacy development?

INTRODUCTION

The class of eager grade one children sits on the floor looking at the Big Book on the stand in front of them. All eyes are studying the big, colourful pictures or following the enlarged print as the teacher points to each word. Or are they? One boy at the back is looking down at his shoes and pulling at the velcro. Another is feeling the long braid of the girl in front of him as it hangs down her back. Another spies a small scrap of paper on the floor and reaches out to pick it up and crumple it even smaller.

My whole language classroom has literacy activities where children participate together as a class. They sit on the carpeted floor looking at the book or chart in front of them. In these activities most of the children are actively involved in the task. For a few children, focusing on the task is difficult because they are distracted by nearby children and things around them like pictures, books, and chair legs. Some children constantly move their bodies by touching, feeling and stretching. The child's location in the group on the floor seems to have an effect because the very children who have difficulty focusing often seem to be attracted to the back of the group.

I wanted my grade one children to become literate and to enjoy reading and writing. I wondered if there was a connection between children's

abilities and/or willingness to focus in class literacy activities and their early literacy development. If so, what role does the teacher play in affecting the student's focus.

BACKGROUND

In teaching grade one children for over fifteen years I know that some children have difficulty focusing in group literacy activities. Often these same children have difficulty with individual reading and writing tasks. Often it's boys who have difficulty with early reading and writing. In her book *Reading the Difference*, Barrs (1994) states, 'It is generally known that girls consistently achieve more highly than boys in reading' (p. 1). Grade one is a critical year for children's literacy because those who aren't reading and writing by the end of grade one frequently struggle throughout their remaining school years with long term negative effects (Allington & Walmsley, 1995). As a grade one teacher I wanted all the children in my class to be successful with literacy. I decided to observe four boys to see how they 'focused' in class literacy activities and to follow their literacy development at the beginning of grade one.

In whole language teaching some literacy tasks involve the whole class at one activity, as seen in shared reading of charts and Big Books discussed by Holdaway (1979) and modelled writing discussed by Cambourne (1988).

The four boys were Nicholas, Daniel, James and Tony and as I observed them in group literacy activities specific questions arose:

Did they focus in these activities?

Were they actively involved in the task?

If not, how do I get them actively involved?

If they don't appear to be attending, does it mean they aren't listening and absorbing something?

Where do they sit in the large group? Does it tend to be in the same place?

How does the location affect their focus?

In which literacy activities do they focus well? Why?

In which ones do they focus least? Why?

Is there a transfer of information and skills from class literacy activities to individual literacy?

DEFINITIONS FOR THE STUDY

What are group literacy activities?

In my grade one classroom these include:

- story time
- shared reading of class charts, songs, rhymes, chants and Big Books
- modelled writing
- alphabet chant and cued articulation of the alphabet
- calender activities
- counting and number activities with the one hundred chart.

What do I mean by 'focus'?

By focus I mean 'to pay attention', 'to attend' and/or 'to actively participate' in the literacy activity.

To have the students understand the concept of 'focusing' we talked about appropriate behaviours when one 'focused on' or 'attended to' an activity. We discussed the need to look, listen, participate, interact and to learn in our activities.

It became known as 'L' time because I shaped my left hand like a capital L with the fingers forming the vertical line and the thumb at right angles forming the horizontal line. Thus 'L' time meant 'Look, Listen and Learn' in our classroom context.

PARAMETERS OF THE THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to observe four boys, Nicholas, Daniel, James and Tony to see how they focused in class literacy activities, and to follow their individual literacy development in early grade one. Did they focus in literacy activities? If not, what were possible reasons for not focusing? What could I, as the classroom teacher, *do* about their focusing or not-focusing? Did the learning in class literacy activities transfer to individual literacy development?

I chose the boys firstly for their different levels of literacy development in starting grade one and secondly, for their varied levels of attentiveness in class activities.

In my whole language classroom many literate skills are acquired through participation in group literacy activities such as story time, shared reading, modelled writing and morning calendar rituals. As the children focus and actively participate in these literacy activities they are exploring language use from two vital sources: literacy of books, songs, rhymes and chants, and as Holdaway (1979) says, 'The language-saturated and personalised experience of the outside world, with all its real purposes for writing' (p.71). My concern has become, 'What if some children are not focusing and actively participating during these important literacy experiences? Are they the same children having difficulty with learning to read and write?'

Prior to group literacy activities we discussed what we were doing, why we were doing it and appropriate behaviours for the activity. This had two purposes - firstly, it had the children understand *why* we did certain activities in developing literacy and secondly, it incorporated *expected behaviours* into the literacy activity for maximising learning. Over time, the children realised that they had some responsibility for their own learning. In order to learn to read in shared reading, for example, the children took responsibility for 'attending' to the task, following the print and participating in the reading.

To explore the concept of students focusing in class literacy activities and following their literacy development in early grade one I examined:

- the different purposes of group literacy activities in developing literacy
- the focus of the four boys in these group literacy activities
- possible reasons for non-focus in these group literacy activities
- the role of the teacher in these group literacy activities
- the individual literacy development of the four boys in early grade one
- the home and family literacy of the boys

Goals of the Study

I had three main goals in this research:

1. To observe how four boys focused in group literacy activities in my whole language classroom.
2. To observe the literacy development of the four boys in early grade one. How was it affected by their focus, or lack of focus? Was there a transfer of information from the class literacy activities to their individual literacy development?
3. To reflect on the teacher's role in class literacy activities to understand how the teacher affected the focus of the boys.

From the observations and reflections I discuss the implications for teachers in providing appropriate classroom environments to maximise children's learning.

Chapter Two

Class Literacy Activities and a Review of the Literature

In this chapter I describe the literacy activities where the students participate as a class and possible reasons for some lack of focus in these activities. I discuss the literacy activities in terms of how they are used, the value of them in developing literacy and what the current literature says of them in developing young children's literacy.

In class literacy activities the children sit on the carpeted area at the front of the room. Here we have the white board (rather than a chalkboard), the calendar wall, a Big Book stand, charts and chart paper, a pocket chart and nearby, our comfortable library area. During whole class activities I like to have the children close to me because it creates a warm, safe, supportive environment and I can make eye contact with individual children. Mathie (1990) emphasises that this closeness is important because 'It also enables them to see clearly and hear easily, which helps them concentrate' (p. 27). I will watch the four boys to find out!

Story time

Story time is a valuable literacy experience for all children and it is especially important for developing readers (Depree and Iverson, 1994). Considerable research shows a connection between early story reading at home and literacy success at school (Milner, 1951; Durkin, 1966; Monroe, 1969; Wells, 1981; Hannon, Weinberger and Nutbrown, 1991).

I read at least four storybooks a day to my class apart from re-readings

of Big Books, and 'early reading' books that students take for Home Reading. Routman (1991) says, 'Reading aloud is seen as the single most influential factor in young children's success in learning to read' (p. 32). The students sit fairly still and focus at story time. They look at the pictures whilst listening to the story for the eight or ten minutes, sometimes interrupting to comment on the story.

Ward (1992) refers to reading aloud to students as one of the most important areas of instruction in beginning reading and he acknowledges the difficulty of observing children's 'attendance' whilst reading to them. 'However, knowing which children have difficulty in attending to the story or other text structure is vital information' (p. 220). One can mentally note and later record the names of those having difficulty with the text or focusing on the story. To actively engage children in stories he suggests that, 'although teachers may not like to interrupt the reading, there is value in interactive incursions or excursions such as occasionally having children predict the next event or extend the structure of the text' (p. 220). Such interactions may be one way of keeping all the group actively involved.

Estler (1994) too, spoke of the interactive nature of literacy stating, 'Opportunities to engage in interactive talk can support the contextualization of language within the narrative world of story. Children may engage listeners in dialogue routines that scaffold the reading event, that help them remember story language or that reflect interactions remembered from read-aloud sessions' (p. 416).

For children who are not attending and actively participating in story time and ensuing discussions, teachers must try to engage them in

responding to texts by questioning and relating to the children's personal experiences. A discussion after a story enables children to express their opinions, feelings and ideas about the book. They relate the story to their experiences and make connections between their lives and the book (Schwartz and Bone, 1995). For students to stay 'engaged and on-task' teachers must help them 'discover personal value in learning' (Fields, 1994, p. 78). Relating their experiences to stories and talking about them, is one way of having students' learning become personal.

Schwartz and Bone (1995) refer to class read-aloud times as valuable opportunities to learn about and evaluate students. 'We use the read-aloud to learner-watch and learner-listen. We continue to collect and interpret information about individual learners in order to program appropriately' (p. 52). This reinforces the notion of the teacher providing an appropriate learning environment and suitable tasks for children. Fields too, refers to the importance of planning appropriate tasks when she says, 'Developmentally inappropriate teaching by adults results in inappropriate behaviour from children' (1994, p. 78).

Shared reading

I used shared reading for Big Books, songs, chants, rhymes and poems as described by Holdaway (1979). Depree and Iversen saw shared reading as a 'a step between reading to children and independent reading by children - the step where children learn to read by reading' (p. 34).

Big Books, chants and rhymes featured enlarged print. The value of enlarged print is that, as the teacher points to each word, the children see the word, say the word and hear the word simultaneously. They use several senses and we learn better when we use multiple senses.

The children experience rhyme, rhythm and repetition in songs, chants and verses. These are fun and easy to remember. Indeed, my class bursts into song when one child spontaneously starts 'I had a little brother...'

In reading Big Books together, the children experience storybook language whilst seeing the print in an enlarged format. Routman (1991) suggests that 'Shared reading is one way of immersing students in rich, literacy-level language without worrying about grade level or reading performance'. She continues, 'The literature is carefully chosen for its high quality of language and illustrations and often includes re-readings of favourite stories and poems', (p. 33).

Shared reading is valuable for extending children's understanding of print. They realise that meaning comes from print and that print makes sense, (Smith, 1983; Goodman & Goodman, 1980; Holdaway, 1979). In the course of getting meaning and messages from print, students see how language is used, e.g. 'ed' words and 'ing' words. They also develop an understanding of conventions of print, e.g. capital letters, apostrophes, quotation marks and exclamation marks. Additionally, the children hear a fluent reader as a model of what a reader does.

In shared book reading Ward (1992) says that 'teachers need to be responsive to the different needs of children within the group'. He continues:

'Children are engaged with the text both for its message and its demonstrations of how print works. Instruction and the active involvement of children in the reading will eliminate most of the

possibilities for confusion, but teachers need to be alert for the children who are at risk because of their lack of knowledge of print conventions' (1992).

Teachers must be aware of 'non-attending' students and use strategies to have them 'actively involved'. In reading Big Books together Holdaway (1979) feels that, 'Attention problems only arise when there is not enough going on'. He continues, 'We've given up calling for attention and admonishing those who are distracted: they *are* so because nothing interesting is going on at that moment' (p. 73). The message for teachers is to keep a 'snappy' pace and to make it so much fun that children *want* to participate and be actively involved in the shared reading.

Modelled Writing

Planned demonstrations of writing are an integral part of the whole language classroom for developing reading and writing simultaneously. Whether it is called 'modelled writing', 'news time' or 'our morning sentence' the purpose is the same: to provide a demonstration of how a writer constructs a piece of writing using conventions of print. Cambourne (1988) says of writing demonstrations:

'Combining thinking out loud and talking about with the actual demonstrations of *doing* reading and writing helps learners make many of the conscious connections between the oral and written forms of the language which need to be made' (p. 104).

In my classroom the modelled writing, or demonstration, is always about something of interest to the children: our class, school or a special

event such as class photos, a pizza lunch, the new rabbits in our room, a story, someone's birthday or lost tooth.

We construct the sentences together, with students contributing words, spellings and punctuation. There are frequent re-readings of the passage and opportunities to look for words that are the same, double letters in words, little words in big words, apostrophes, question marks and other writing conventions. The students call out together when spelling words. At other times I ask specific children to spell the word. Individuals come out to the whiteboard and read the sentences as they point to the words with the pointer. They enjoy this activity enormously and can't wait to be picked for a turn to read to the class.

Reinhard (1989) said of writing demonstrations in her grade one-two classroom, 'We find that if we use written language day-in and day-out the children begin to understand what we write and then begin to imitate our writing activities' (p. 89).

Despite the literacy value of demonstrating writing on the board, modelled writing is the time when it's difficult to hold the interest of *all* the class. There are five or six children who have difficulty focusing in this activity. I reflect to try to solve the problem of inattention and lack of focus. I wonder: Why do some children wriggle and fidget when doing modelled writing as a whole class literacy activity?

Why is there a lack of focus in some literacy activities?

Have the students been sitting too long?

Do they need the physical activity to move large muscles?

Fields (1994) says that, "Boys demonstrate higher levels of large-muscle activity and are drawn to games of physical contact. Due to these developmental differences, boys may fit less well into a quiet and controlled school environment", (p. 50). Children suffering from Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) have difficulty sitting still and attending to tasks and as Serfontein (1990) says, 'these children have difficulty in focusing and sustaining their attention long enough to initiate and complete any set task. They tend to be easily distracted from the task at hand by other stimuli, such as noise or movement' (p. 19). Landau and McAninch (1993), refer to attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) as '...the current psychiatric term used to describe a set of symptoms reflecting excessive inattention, overactivity and impulsive responding' (p.49). They write that 'highly structured academic settings create the greatest problem for these children' (Landau & McAninch, p.50).

None of the four boys are diagnosed as having ADD or ADHD. Their movements may simply be in keeping with the physical development of their age group and gender. Indeed, Daniel and Tony who are often wriggly *can* sit still for videos. This is reinforced by Landau & McAninch (1993) who state that, 'Apparently the nature of the task seems crucial when determining if the child has significant difficulty paying attention' (p. 50). Is it a matter of interest in the task? Is it an appropriate task for the students?

Reinhard (1989) spoke of identifying children whose writing is slow to evolve and acknowledged that 'it may be hard to keep them interested in news time' (p. 80). Perhaps the frequent movement of some children when sitting for modelled writing is 'normal' and to be expected in a group of grade one children.

Are they fiddling and fidgeting to move small muscles?

Just as some children need to move large muscles frequently, others need to move small muscles. Fields (1994) makes the point that 'Some youngsters can't seem to sit and listen without having something to occupy their hands' (p.91). She describes a class where these children are allowed to sit at the back of the group in story time with puzzles and books as long as they are quiet and not disturbing the ones in front. Wolter too, (1992) suggests that teachers in story time can 'Keep the fingers of the child who is prone to poking others busy with a worry stone or small piece of string' (p. 74). Would these suggestions work for writing demonstrations?

Do they wriggle and squirm whilst waiting for a turn?

In our modelled writing there is a mixture of students spelling and reading together and individuals spelling and reading. For some children 'waiting for a turn' is difficult because they want to give the answer or share their knowledge and ideas immediately. Fields (1994) spoke of these difficulties saying, 'Waiting for a turn is incredibly hard on young children for several reasons. One reason is that young children don't have a sense of time... Another problem is that young children don't understand why they must wait' (p. 92).

Does the modelled writing allow enough participation? Do they not focus because they can't wait that long for a turn? Or is it that the demonstration is not making sense?

Do they wriggle and squirm because the demonstration is not making sense to them?

In becoming literate, children need many demonstrations of writing and reading activities to show them how writing can be useful and necessary in their lives. Cambourne wrote that, 'Learners who cannot make sense of the demonstrations being provided will soon cease to engage with them' (p. 206). Are they not focused because the writing is not making sense to them? This would fit with Reinhard's observation stated earlier (p.14 this paper) that some children who are evolving slowly as writers may be difficult to hold in modelled writing.

Do they wriggle and squirm because of a short attention span?

Some children do have short attention spans but in my experience it is because of a lack of interest in the task at the time. Fields (1994) refers to attention spans and one teacher's handling of this in an early childhood setting when she says, 'He knows that they have long attention spans when they are doing something important to them. The myth of short attention spans is the result of giving children trivial activities that are not engrossing and not their choice' (p. 87). Is this the case with the modelled sentence? It is not a 'trivial' activity in terms of literacy development in a whole language classroom, but it may not be engrossing or the student's choice at the time.

In a similar vein, Delena (1992) asked teachers to write down factors

that caused them to consider some children 'at-risk'. Many responses referred to concentration with such comments as 'poor concentration span', 'very limited concentration' and 'lacks concentration in group and individual tasks' (p. 189). Delena indicated that these responses located the problem in the child. Instead, he suggested that teachers look at the kinds of situations, and in what particular tasks, the child found it hard to concentrate. I thought about this from two viewpoints. Firstly, is the modelled writing in this format developmentally appropriate and secondly, is the child taking some responsibility for his own learning?

Each child has a responsibility to actively participate and interact for his literacy development. Is the child aware of this responsibility? Does he accept this responsibility for his literacy growth?

Do they fiddle and play to get attention?

Some students are constantly touching and feeling their fingers, their shoes, a classmate's shirt or the girl's long hair in front of them. Are these movements necessary parts of the body make-up or is it a ploy to stop the flow of the task and give the attention to them in the belief that some attention, even negative attention, is better than no attention? If the teacher interrupts the flow of the activity to deal with the disturber it affects the whole group. Larking (1987) wrote of disturbances affecting the level of engagement that children can give to their work:

'Studies have shown that interruptions and behavioural sanctions occurring when children are on task do indeed affect student achievement (Berliner 1979, Brophy 'Teacher Behaviour'. 1979, Rosenshine 1979, Stallings 1980). The effective teacher will therefore aim at ensuring that the

interruptions are kept to a minimum and that the management practices are employed that maximise the learning time and the task engagement of their pupils' (p. 69).

My question then becomes 'are the students still paying attention with their frequent wriggling and large body movements?'

Do they fiddle and play with shoes and clothing because of poor social skills?

In classroom settings there are social skills children acquire to fit into class routines and rituals. Listening skills and following instructions are necessary in Primary classrooms but some students have difficulty with these. Benton-Murray (1994) found that children who lacked social competence disrupted interactions in social settings. She wrote:

'Therefore, the presence of inappropriate social skills was often the reason for children's trouble functioning in group activities necessary to the school experience.

Students who demonstrated low prosocial skills would typically loose interest midway through a group lesson or activity often playing with their shoes, clothing, or hair, and in some cases, that of a neighbour. A prosocial skill was defined as an act that aids or benefits someone else. These skills were viewed as central to a child's social competence (Doescher & Sugawara, 1989). Thus short attention span, high desire for instant gratification combined with a high degree of restlessness created a situation in which these children were failing to acquire good listening skills necessary for success in school (pp. 7-8).

Are some of the boys lacking in social skills that cause them to wriggle and fiddle and become distracted in group literacy activities?

What of the students who don't contribute voluntarily?

Are they not focused or do they *choose* not to participate?

Some students appear to listen and attend in activities, yet specific questions can reveal little interest or understanding in what is being discussed. Are they disinterested? Are they daydreaming? In her book *The Learner's Way*, Reinhard (1989) lists the student behaviours she tends to overlook in her classroom, including talking in quiet time and daydreaming (p. 36). Instead she concentrates on positive responses to appropriate actions for encouraging expected classroom behaviours.

Fields (1994) wrote 'When adults are constantly in charge of children's behaviour, the message to the children is that they are not capable of making good decisions for themselves. Their confidence in themselves as thinkers and decision makers is damaged' (p. 167).

Is this what happens when the teacher frequently brings the inattentive child back to active participant in the large group? Where is the line between the child being 'engaged' in the activity and the teacher 'controlling' the child? Where is the line between the child 'taking responsibility for his own learning' and actively participating, and the teacher bringing him into the activity by 'coercion' of sorts?

By closely observing students in group literacy activities and reflecting on their actions and behaviours, teachers can evaluate the activities he/she is providing, as well as helping students to understand their role and responsibilities in effective learning.

Chapter Three

Description of the Program

The Classroom Population

In this study I work with a class of twenty-three grade one children in a suburban school in Yukon. The school has a population of 500 students from Kindergarten to grade six. The students in my classroom include mainly white middle-class suburban families and some First Nations children, all of whom speak English as a first language. The socioeconomic range is from welfare families to double income families. The four boys in the study are from two parent families with the mothers at home: that is, the mothers are not working full time in the workforce.

All the students had half day Kindergarten last year. Some students are struggling with sound-symbol relationships, some are independently reading and writing, but most are emergent readers and writers.

Classroom Context

In whole class literacy activities the children sit on the carpet at the front of the room. In this area we have the white board, the calendar wall, the Big Book stand, class charts on the chart-stand, a pocket chart and nearby, our library area. In whole class activities I like to have the children close because it creates a warm, safe, supportive environment and I can make eye contact with individual children. The children choose where they sit and with whom they sit, on the carpet in front of the board or Big Book.

Classroom Activities

Class literacy activities take place at various times throughout the day. In each literacy activity the children have many opportunities for large and small muscle movements because the tasks are interspersed with songs, rhymes and actions.

8:45 Attendance and calendar is first thing in the morning. The students participate in activities about attendance, the day, the date, the weather, the temperature, the number of days at school and times of specific activities throughout the day.

9:05 Shared reading of class charts and rhymes. Whilst reading there are actions to accompany chants such as 'Crackers and Crumbs', 'The Monster Stomp', 'I Like Kids' and 'Fishing'.

9:15 Modelled writing. The children and I construct sentences of interest and I write them on the white board. There are many opportunities for students to actively participate in spelling words and reading the sentences. Prior to the modelled sentence we do our 'cued articulation' with hand signs as one child points to the large letters of the alphabet at the top of the white board.

9:30 Co-operative 'Show and Tell' (our pre-writing time).

9:40 - 10:10 Journal writing, followed by sharing the writing in 'sharing time' (sometimes called author's chair or author's circle).

10:30 Shared reading of Big Books. After reading a Big Book the children stretch and move, e.g. bunny hops after reading 'Puppy and I' and giant steps after reading 'The Hungry Giant'.

At various times throughout the day the children sit quietly for up to ten minutes for a story, then stand and stretch before moving into a circle formation for the ensuing discussion about the story.

Such activities are reinforced by Fields (1994) who says, ' Frequent opportunities to move and actively participate extend the amount of time children can cope with group times. Songs and rhymes that involve full body movement provide useful breaks' (p. 92).

PROCEDURE OF STUDY

Getting Started

When school started in September I observed the boys in activities:

- a) I observed them in class literacy tasks, such as story time, shared reading, modelled writing and calendar time.
- b) I watched, listened and talked to them about journal entries.
- c) I monitored their reading in our Home Reading Program (Our reading books were organised into Reading Recovery levels one to twenty and colour coded into five colours: 1 - 4 green, 5 - 8 yellow, 9 - 12 blue, 13 - 16 red, 17 - 20 orange).
- d) I had our Learning Assistant test the boys using four Reading Recovery Diagnostic tests (Letter Identification of lower case letters and sounds, Word Test (List B) and Writing Vocabulary) to get a picture of their literacy levels at the beginning of grade one.

From September to December I had a fourth year Student Teacher in my classroom for her final practicum. Ms. Thomas was in our classroom full time and was an integral part of planning, preparation and running the

classroom. In late October and early November she had three weeks of 'full control' when she was responsible for the class operation. During these weeks I observed and recorded information on student behaviours in class literacy activities, paying particular attention to the four boys. At other times Ms. Thomas observed and recorded the behaviours when I was teaching.

Gathering the Data

I kept a daily Journal recording things of interest that happened in the classroom. I observed and noted what the students did in group literacy activities (see Appendix 1). I observed and noted what the four boys did in group literacy activities (see Appendix 2). I observed and worked with the boys at Journal writing times, keeping copies of their work as examples of writing development. I kept notes, labels and letters from them as other evidence of their writing.

I listened to the boys read many 'early reading' books and recorded the books in their 'Home Reading Folder'. I also interviewed the boys about our group literacy activities (see Appendix 3).

The parents answered a questionnaire about their child's focus and concentration in literacy activities and other activities at home (see Appendix 4). Additionally, I talked with parents and took notes about their literacy practices with their children at home.

Chapter Four

Results, Insights and Actions

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss their levels of literacy as Nicholas, Daniel, James and Tony entered grade one. I look at their 'focus' in class literacy activities and assess their reading and writing in the first three weeks of school. I then discuss their focus in class literacy activities and their individual literacy growth from September till December.

Starting School

What were the boys' levels of literacy on entering grade one?

The boys came into my grade one class at different starting points of literacy development. Their levels of literacy at that time resulted from home and family literacy as well as Kindergarten experiences. All had attended half day Kindergarten last year.

To gauge their level of literacy development, I observed the boys' literacy behaviours in class, group and individual activities in the first three weeks of school and our Learning Assistant gave them four Reading Recovery diagnostic tests. She tested them individually on Letter Identification of lower case letters and sounds, Word Test (List B) and a Writing Vocabulary Test (see sample tests, Appendix 5).

What did I find out from the tests?

Reading Recovery Diagnostic Tests

	Letter names	Letter sounds	Word Test	Writing Vocab.
Nicholas	25	21	8	10 words
Daniel	17	3	0	1 word
James	20	3	2	5 words
Tony	26	19	4	13 words

Nicholas

At the beginning of school in September, Nicholas seemed to focus well in class literacy activities. He sat fairly still in groups and watched what was going on. In story time he looked at the pictures as the teacher held up the book and he listened attentively to the stories. He contributed to class discussions after stories by commenting on parts he liked or relating something in his life to the story. In shared reading of Big Books and class charts Nicholas followed the print and when the language pattern became clear he joined in reading.

From the Reading Recovery Tests I found out that Nicholas knew twenty five letter names, and twenty one sounds (u, y, q, e and i not known). In the Word Test of fifteen frequently used words he recognised eight words

and in the writing vocabulary test he wrote ten words (his name, mom, dad, up, the, dog, a, he, Sam, cat).

In the class Reading Circle where children took two books for 'Home Reading', Nicholas chose books that were freshly introduced, e.g. in the second week I introduced the Big Book of 'The Monster's Party' and he immediately chose the small version to take home to read. He tracked accurately when reading familiar 'early reading' books.

Nicholas wrote short sentences in his Journal about things he did at home, e.g. 'sam cm to ma hos' (Sam came to my house) on August thirtieth and 'I am pla en ma fot' (I am playing in my fort) on September fifth.

In class literacy activities from September to December Nicholas continued to focus well in most literacy activities. He sat in all locations within the group including front row, second row, middle and back. He rarely fiddled, talked to peers or looked around but tended to focus on the task.

Nicholas contributed to discussions after stories and sometimes interacted with stories part way through as in Kusegak's *Northern Lights The Soccer Trails*. He connected the northern lights in the story to a time he saw northern lights outside with his dad.

During shared reading of class charts Nicholas focused on the print, often leading the class in the repeated readings of familiar stories, rhymes and chants - these were also printed in Newsbooks that went home each night for our Home Reading Program. Nicholas practiced his reading at home every night with his interested parents as well as hearing them read stories to him. They gave him great support and many demonstrations of literacy in their daily lives.

In shared reading of Big Books Nicholas interacted with the text, joining in when he felt comfortable with the language pattern. He continued the trend of taking home the small version of Big Books, e.g. 'I'm the King of the Mountain' and 'The Kick-a-lot Shoes' for his nightly reading with his parents.

Nicholas became a fluent reader using effective reading strategies such as re-reading, picture cues, grapho-phonetic cues and context cues. He was enthusiastic about reading and challenged himself to try new and different books as well as enjoying familiar books. In December he was reading books at levels sixteen and seventeen like 'the Gingerbread Man' and 'Stacks of Caps'. He also liked to read non-fiction books and he frequently brought personal books to school to share with classmates.

During modelled sentences Nicholas participated in constructing the sentences, spelling words and re-reading. He joined in if children were spelling words together, and waited quietly if individuals were asked. To challenge him I asked him to spell less common words in our sentences such as 'sugar-cane' when he brought some to share, or to use a combination like "ing" in "ice-fishing". When re-reading with the pointer he accurately tracked and read the sentences.

Nicholas' writing showed constant growth. In September he wrote simple sentences, left spaces between words and sounded out words, e.g. cum (come) and pla (playing). With daily writing, including Journals three times a week, his writing improved rapidly. By November, he wrote longer sentences, added details, gave additional information and spelled many frequently used words correctly (see figure 1).

11/1/95
 Yesterday we had a party.
 It was Halloween.
 I like Sam. I like on Haloween.
 I got lots of candies eitea dii.
 The Haloween I was a vampire.
 I e'it cadii tila I was full.
 We hlp The ^{environment} invarnt.
 We had a qineta.



Figure 1

Nicholas' Journal Entry, November 1st

Yesterday we had a party. It was Halloween. I like Sam. I like on Halloween. I got lots of candies. I eat candies. This Halloween I was a vampire. I ate candies till I was full. We help the environment. We had a pinata.

During September, October and November Nicholas wrote notes and letters to me. He wrote them at home and gave them to me at school the next day (see figures 2 and 3). With encouragement and support from his parents he wrote about things he did at home, e.g weekend activities, playing with a friend or his dad's birthday. I always replied to his notes and letters, as I did to any of the students who wrote to me.

Dear Mrs Swan
 On the weekend i
 had my art in my
 art we made masks
 and paper. I am
 going to Sarah's
 house. She is in the
 other grade one class

Figure 2

(On the weekend I had my art. In my art we made masks and paper. I am going to Sarah's house. She is in the other grade one class).

Dear Mrs. Swan
 I have a new head
 band. I went to my
 Friends house. His name
 is CaleF. You used to
 have him in your class

Figure 3

A letter from Nicholas

Nicholas' writing behaviours were interesting to observe. He wrote independently spelling most words on his own. He persevered with his writing until it was finished to his satisfaction, often continuing after recess or a break. He took great pride in presenting his work carefully and neatly (see figure 3). Drawings were detailed and carefully executed to enhance the message in his writing (see figure 1). By December he was writing longer stories, spelling many common words using standard spelling and printing evenly on the lines.

The Learning Assistant re-tested Nicholas in November using the same four Reading Recovery tests, with pleasing results. Nicholas knew the letters and sounds on both tests but went from reading eight words on the first Word Test to reading all fifteen words on the second. On the first Writing Vocabulary he wrote ten words but on the second he wrote twenty one words. There was yet another difference - on the first Writing Vocabulary he wrote common words like 'mom, dad, the, like, Sam and cat', but on the second he wrote more difficult words like 'happy, very, school, bee and could'.

Nicholas' confidence and enthusiasm for literacy was captured in a short journal entry on November twelfth that read:

I can caot to 100.
I can wrat lose of wrds.
And I can rwd.

(I can count to 100. I can write lots of words. And I can read).

His interest in words and his delight in learning was captured at our student/ parent/ teacher conference when he presented me with a note containing almost unpronounceable words that he had copied from *The Book Of Tricky Words* (see figure 4). He laughed joyeously at my attempts to decipher and pronounce the words, then had great fun telling me what they meant! Nicholas was enjoying himself in becoming literate.

114 11 95
do you know what
Craeonyxteris?
Thonglo ng yaiis?
do you know what
priodontes giganteus is?

IN THE
Book of tricky words

Figure 4

Fun with literacy

Another note from Nicholas.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Daniel

At the beginning of school Daniel sometimes focused in group literacy activities. He sat still but often played with his hands, shoes, clothes and/or the children close by him. In story time he looked at the pictures and listened to the story. In shared reading he sometimes looked at the Big Book or the charts but frequently looked at the teacher observer rather than the print.

From the Reading Recovery tests Daniel knew seventeen letter names and three sounds (z, j, s). He didn't recognise any words and the Learning Assistant commented that 'he didn't know' or 'guessed wildly' at the words. In the Writing Vocabulary Test he wrote one word; his first name.

For Home Reading Daniel chose familiar books that had been read and re-read in class, from books in the level one to four box. In his Journal Daniel consistently wrote one word - 'me'. However, in sharing his Journal he told detailed stories about his drawing and concluded by pointing to the word and reading, 'me' (see figure 5).

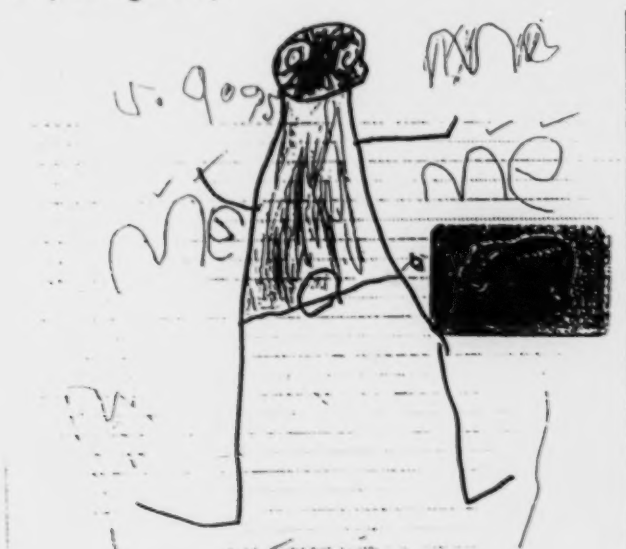


Figure 5

Daniel's Journal entry

In class literacy activities from September to December Daniel focused well for videos and stories. He sat still and attended by looking at the pictures and listening to the stories. He interacted with the text in storybooks by relating the stories to his life and contributing to discussions, e.g. after 'Hairy Bear' he said, 'You walk away slowly if you see a bear'.

When reading the class charts Daniel *seemed to try* to focus on the print but instead, he often looked at me as the teacher observer or Ms. Thomas who was pointing to the words. Ms. Thomas sometimes mentioned his name without interrupting the flow of the activity, or used her hands to indicate he needed to look at the print, in an attempt to have him actively participate in the reading. Prior to reading the charts she asked the group, and sometimes Daniel, why it was important for students to look at the print whilst reading ('because we learn to read', or 'it helps us know the words to read'). Additionally she emphasised that students had a responsibility to focus on the text when reading because this was one way they learned to read.

In shared reading of Big Books, Daniel fluctuated between looking at the print, the pictures, students around him, his shoes or the teacher observer. He joined in reading if he knew the familiar language pattern especially if it was rhythmical and/or repetitious as in 'Meanies' and 'The Monster's Party'. In Big Books with more complex language patterns Daniel looked at the pictures but rarely joined in reading, as in 'When the King Rides By' and 'Stacks of Caps'.

By October Daniel still wrote 'me' in his Journal. His drawings were detailed and action-packed accompanied by verbal, dramatic descriptions

but his written language did not meet his verbal explanations. Apart from 'me', he sometimes used other words like 'Kermit' and 'jail'. In November, he started to label other parts e.g. 'jnk yd' (junkyard). For full sentences he dictated to the teacher or student teacher (see Figure 6).



Figure 6

Daniel's dictated sentence

Unlike many other children in the class, Daniel had not used a familiar sentence pattern as a stepping stone in developing his writing, e.g 'I like...', 'I can...' or 'I see...' Then December sixth - a big 'ah ah!' Daniel wrote 'I like...' on his own in journal time (see Figure 7).

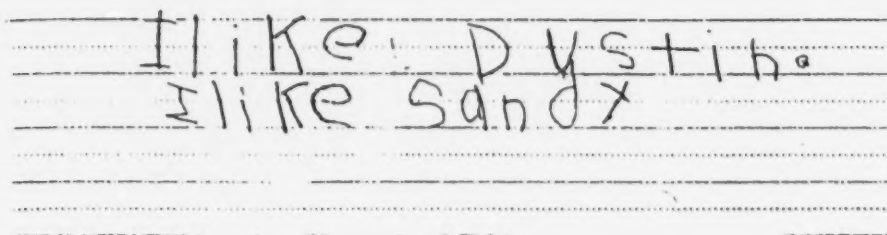


Figure 7

Daniel's first sentences in his Journal.

Note the period at the end of the first sentence.

Daniel brought two writing samples from home to share with me. One was the alphabet that he wrote in capitals (ABC...) and the second was a small picture. Near Christmas he brought a letter from Santa to share with the class. I read it to the students and made a copy for all to read. In his Journal on the day of the Santa letter, he copied his address from the envelope as his writing.

Daniel's focus in modelled writing was erratic. He participated in verbally constructing the sentences but rarely participated in group spellings. His location in the group was a factor in his 'paying attention' to the task with his participation highest if he sat in the front row or second row. When Daniel

was towards the back or to the extreme sides he had difficulty attending to the task, especially by October when he had established a friendship with Peter. They sat together and 'attending' became very difficult. It was more fun to fiddle with objects in his pockets, pull at velcro on his shoes or whisper to Peter. If he was in the front or second row it was easier to engage him in the work by asking questions such as, 'What word is this?' or 'What do you think the next word will be?' He picked out words that were the same in the writing, e.g. 'the' and 'the', however recognising and spelling common words was difficult for him.

By the end of October Daniel was making little progress in his literacy development and this was a concern for his parents and for me. He liked stories and contributed to discussions by relating the story to personal experiences but in shared reading he only occasionally followed the print. Daniel read a core of ten books from levels two to six in our Reading Circle. He chose from these books for Home Reading and practiced them with his mom most nights. His tracking had improved so that he pointed accurately to the words as he read the familiar books but he didn't recognise the common words out of context of the sentence pattern. Despite repeated readings he wasn't developing a sight vocabulary of frequently used words. This observation was backed up in the Reading Recovery re-tests in late November.

On the Word Test the first time, he guessed wildly at the fifteen words; on the second test he didn't identify any words correctly but said words that featured the same letter, e.g. 'it' for 'to', 'me' for 'Mr', 'dog' for 'big' and 'Gerry' for 'going'. In the Letter Identification Test Daniel went from recognising

seventeen letter names to recognising twenty letter names and from knowing three sounds to knowing nine sounds. On the Writing Vocabulary test he wrote four words; his full name, 'me' and 'is'. He also had 'bad' for 'bed', 'ti' for 'it' and 'srra' for 'Sierra' which were close attempts.

At Parent/Teacher interviews in late November I suggested we refer Daniel to the Learning Assistant for individual help. We would pinpoint specific things to work on with him, for thirty minutes a day. Meanwhile his parents agreed to continue reading to him, and hearing him read his books each night. Additionally, his writing and drawing would still be encouraged at home.

In December Daniel started to read! He read and accurately tracked language pattern books from levels three to six. To expand his horizons I introduced a new book to him each day which he then added to his Book Box. Daniel took the new book home and it gradually became a familiar one for reading with his family. Another highlight occurred in the week before Christmas when he and his mom wrote a poem at home about his three cats. Daniel delighted in sharing the funny poem with us and I could see that he was just starting to enjoy his growing literacy.

James

At the beginning of school in September, James sat still and quietly in class literacy activities, rarely looking at those around him. He did not fiddle or fidget or touch others. In story time he looked at the book and listened attentively to the story. He seemed to enjoy Big Books and attended closely to the pictures and print. In reading the class charts James followed the print but didn't immediately join in reading.

On the Reading Recovery tests he knew twenty letter names, three sounds (f, k, z), recognised two words (to, like) and wrote five words (his name, no, dad, mom, like). For Home Reading James chose familiar books from the level one to four box, that had been read and re-read in class. In his Journal he drew simple pictures and dictated sentences about them. I wrote the sentence on the page to give him the idea of attaching print to pictures, e.g. 'My dog' and 'I am on the swing'. He seemed to be a non-writer and a non-reader in the first few weeks of school.

In class literacy activities from September to December James continued to sit still and focus in story time and shared reading. He sat in the front row or second row and kept his hands to himself, rarely fiddling or fidgeting. He looked at the book in story time and didn't interject. In reading the charts James read along quietly when he knew the sentences and the rhymes. These charts were also printed in our Newsbooks that went home for Home Reading. James practiced reading the sentences and rhymes each night with his interested parents.

He focused very well in our Big Book readings and from the front row watched closely as the pointer followed each word. He joined in reading

when he knew the language pattern.

James made steady progress in developing his literacy but there were several dramatic jumps along the way. In mid-September he started sounding out words and writing down initial consonants in his Journal (see figure 8).

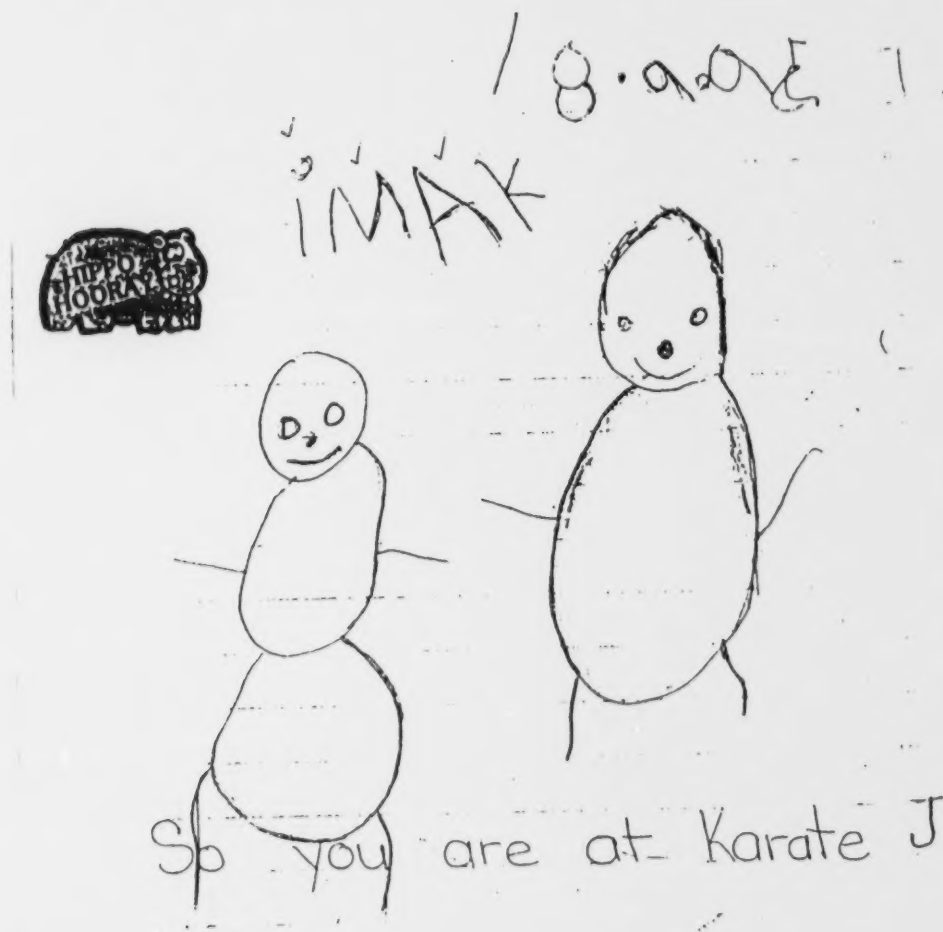


Figure 8

James writes some initial consonants.

(I am at karate)

By the end of September he added final consonants (see figure 9).



Figure 9

I like my man

By the end of October he started writing words he knew, on his Journal page (see figure 10).

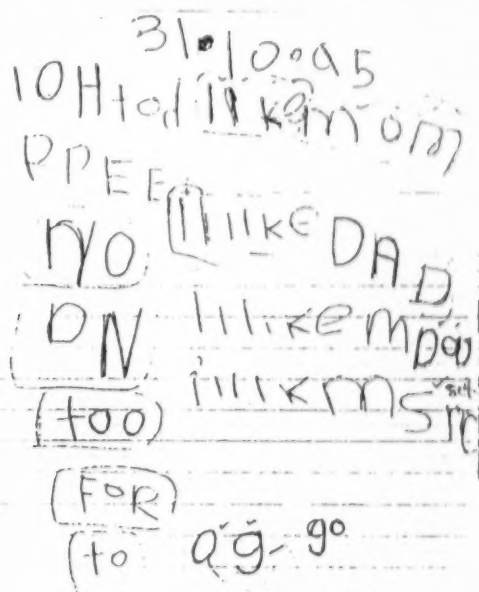


Figure 10

James' writing continued to develop. He went from being a non-writer in class in early September to writing longer sentences with extensive use of sounding out and correctly spelling some words by November. He didn't always leave spaces between words, although he was aware of this need in writing. On November tenth James brought a paper from home entitled 'I know these words' and he listed ones that he could write (see figure 11). In the classroom we had a chart of 'We know these words' that we read amongst our class charts each morning. This was evidence of a transfer of information from a class literacy activity to individual literacy development.

I KNOW THESE WORDS

Don	go
Too	got
to	
No	zee
on	THE
off	FOH
MOM	me
DAD	W
I like	we
up	FOR

Figure 11

'I know these words'

James brought notes, letters and drawings from home to share with us. He had great support from his parents in reading and writing and they read to him each night. His mom said that his reading, writing and drawing had increased since the family had discarded their television set in October.

James focused most of the time in modelled writing but rarely called out or participated voluntarily. He responded if asked to contribute a sentence or to spell a word. I asked him to spell words he knew in order to increase his confidence. By late October he knew how to spell many frequently used words and he had started to sound out words. In November he was prepared to take risks and 'have-a-go' at spelling words. He read along with the group in reading the sentences and pointed accurately to the words in re-reading if requested to read on his own. Otherwise he sat quietly letting other's have a turn.

Another jump in James' literacy development occurred in late September when he read a level eight book (until then he read a variety of books from levels two, three and four). After several shared readings of the Big Book 'Supper for a Troll', (level eight) James took the small copy and read it almost perfectly. I saw this as an example of his focus and active participation in a group literacy activity (shared reading) and ensuing transfer of literacy skills to his literacy growth.

By December James was reading well at level fourteen and I had discovered an interesting pattern to his reading. He took home one or two familiar books such as 'Supper for a Troll' and 'Know What I can Do?' both level eight books, and he took one as a challenge, e.g 'The Kick-a -lot Shoes'

at level fourteen. He then practiced it for several nights until he was happy with his reading - that book then became the familiar book and another was taken as a challenging book.

He used effective reading strategies of re-reading, picture cues, context cues and graphophonic cues. James enjoyed reading and challenged himself with more difficult books. He also took books home for his Mom or Dad to read to him, such as the 'Franklin' books. At Christmas time James gave me a note (figure 12) that said:

D ms Swan
I like your teaching an I being writing a lot
From James

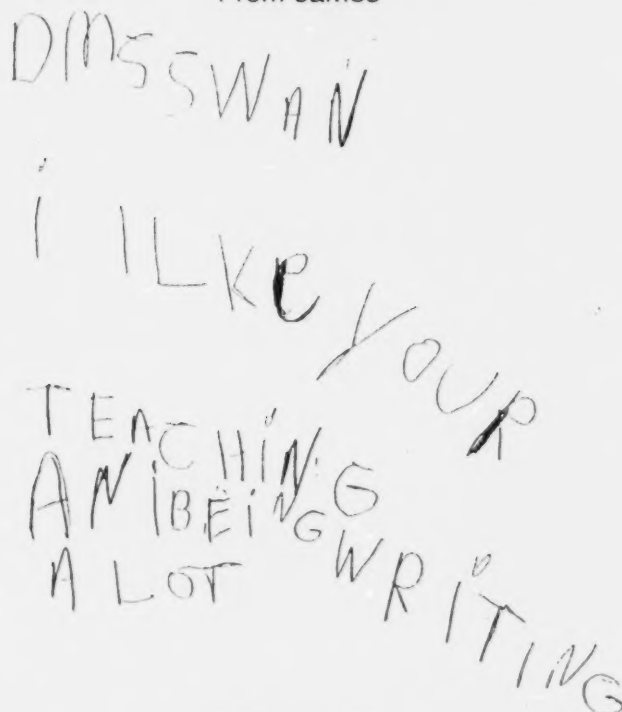


Figure 12

James was 'writing a lot' and he was taking responsibility for his own learning and literacy in supportive and encouraging environments of home and school.

Tony

At the beginning of the school year Tony rarely sat still for literacy activities, except stories. Sometimes with Big Books he was reasonably still and seemed to attend. In modelled writing and the morning calendar he was very wriggly with lots of large body movements and touching others, e.g. Jane's hair, Michael's arm or Robbie's sweater. Sometimes I put him beside me thinking that he'd focus better - but it rarely worked. His body seemed to be on the move the whole time.

From the Reading Recovery tests Tony knew twenty six letter names, nineteen sounds (u, y, q, x, i and e not known) and recognised four words (to, up, like, on). He wrote thirteen words (his name, sibling's name, I, like, mom, mommy, dad, daddy, my, dog, on, no). For Home Reading Tony chose familiar books that had been read and re-read in class from levels one to four.

In class literacy activities from September to December Tony sat still for videos and stories. He looked at the pictures in the books and sometimes interrupted the story to comment or relate some aspect of the story to his life. The only time I saw him sit still for any length of time was when he watched videos, as in the twenty minutes of 'The Tale of Peter Rabbit'.

In all other literacy activities he was rarely still for more than two or three minutes. Sometimes he seemed to wriggle and squirm constantly, much to the consternation of those near him since it frequently involved touching those people.

In reading Big Books Tony's focus was erratic. He tended to sit at the back because 'there's not much people at the back so I can concentrate' - yet he acknowledged that he was distracted by things around

him. In his own words, 'There's so much things over there that catch my eye - library books, trash can, my picture.' These comments came from our October twenty seventh interview when he said he liked sitting at the back. Interestingly, for much of November he placed himself in the middle of the group and sometimes in the second row, rather than at the back.

In reading the class charts Tony could say why he needed to follow the words but in the interview he said he didn't like the charts, " Because, I well, I can't read the charts and I can't see all the words." Since he sat at the back at that point, he may have had some difficulty seeing all the words. However I wasn't sure whether this was a reference to having trouble with his eyesight, or that it was physically difficult to see the charts when he was at the back. (I realised that not all of the group could see the text if the sentences were printed near the bottom of the long charts. I switched to using wide chart paper where the print was higher).

At our student/parent/teacher conference on November seventeenth Tony's mom suggested it would be easier to 'pay attention' if he sat at the front of the group. Tony replied that he didn't like sitting at the front when reading the charts because 'I get a stiff neck.'

Tony's writing started slowly in September. In his Journal he drew pictures and labelled them, such as 'T rex' and 'birthday 6'. He copied 'birthday' from a class chart and added the six because it was his sixth birthday. There was no attempt to work out the words for himself preferring to copy from print around the room. Another example was 'Meanies' which he copied from our Big Book.

In early October he started using language patterns, e.g. I like... with his mom, dad, class names and Power Rangers (see figure 13).

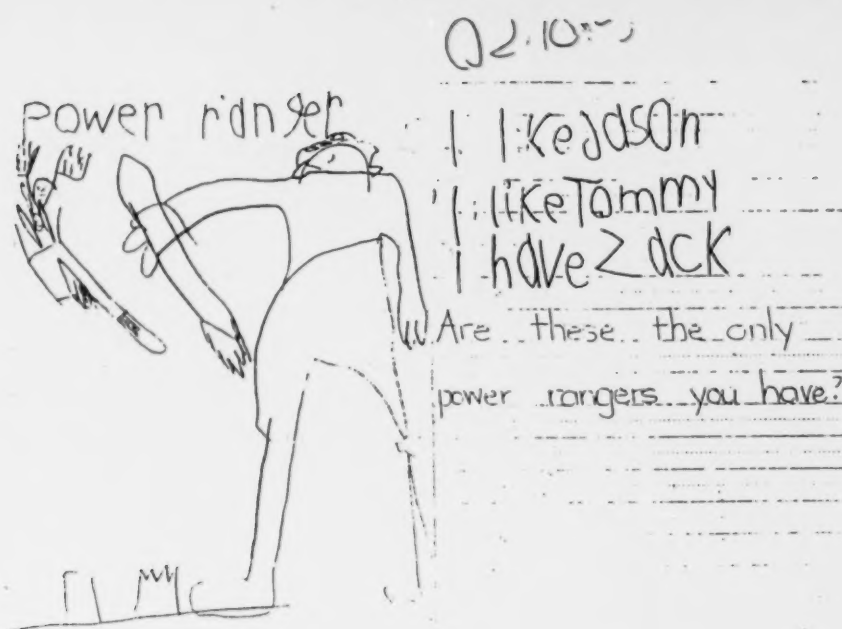


Figure 13

Tony's 'I like ...' sentences

After Halloween he varied his sentences and added different information (see Figure 14).

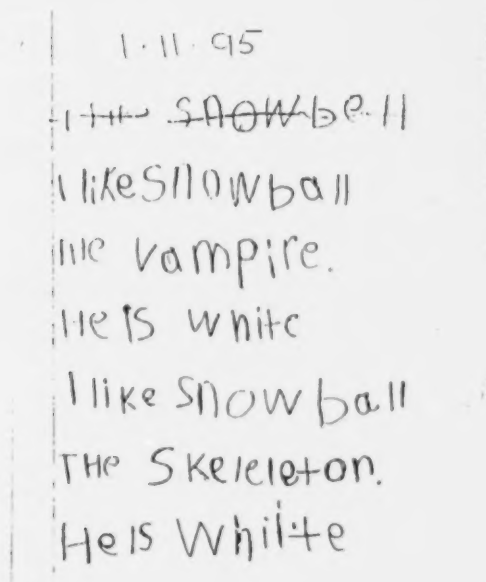


Figure 14

This was a turning point because he sat and wrote without interruptions and he realised he could write and read something other than just, 'I like Mom', 'I like Dad'. He continued to grow and from November onwards he started using literacy in daily life for a variety of 'real world' personal experiences. He wrote a letter to Mrs. King asking to see the school rabbits after they left our room and went to her classroom. He wrote a letter to the Raptors Basketball Club asking for a basketball, a hoop, a jersey and an autograph. He talked at length about the new Toronto basketball team and I offered to send a letter to them if he wrote it (see Figure 15).

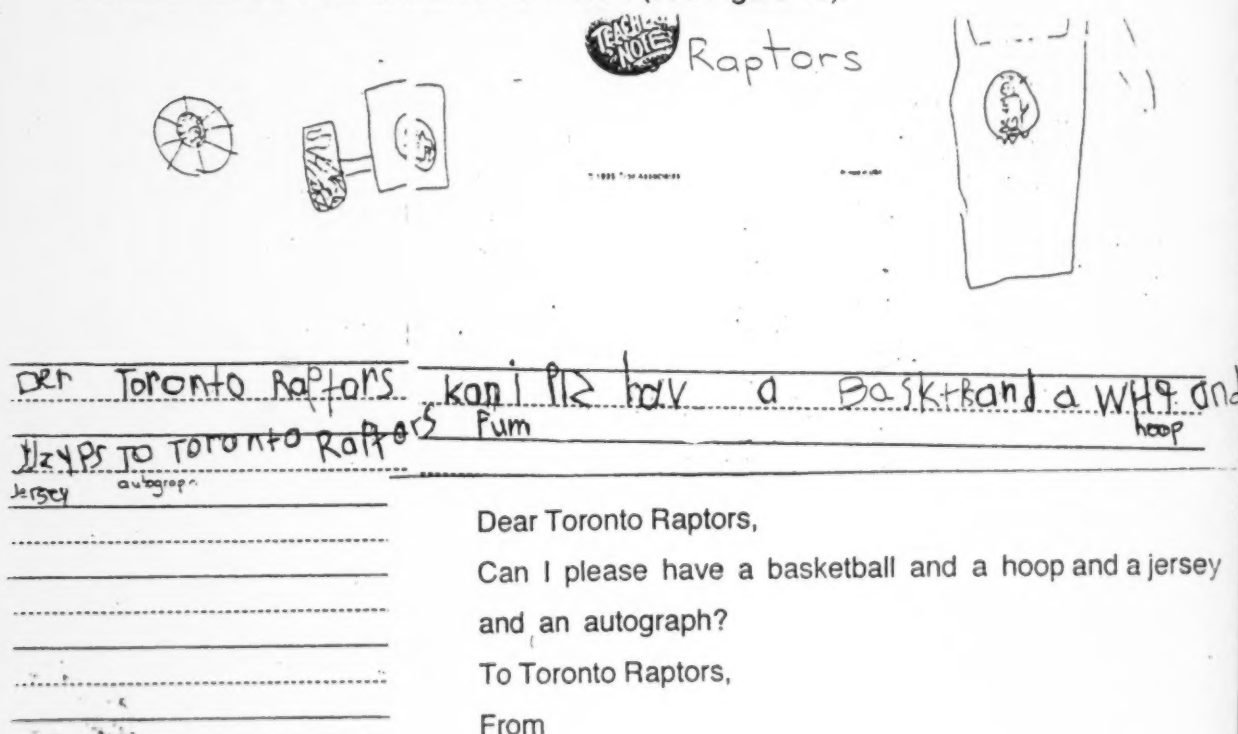


Figure 15

Tony's letter to the Raptors Basketball Club

He was thrilled with their response of a letter, information, stickers and an autographed photograph - he saw personal literacy in action.

Within the classroom Tony was writing for many reasons including Journal, reminder notes, thank you notes, messages and labels. In activity time he made a lego car and a class expectation was that if a student made something and wanted to keep it on display for a few days, the creation had to be named and labelled. This was Tony's label:

'Tony med ths car wen hy was pleain wef moblo. Thr funt uv the cor it can trn. Ther is a get awea helocotr on the bak'

(Tony made this car when he was playing with mobilo. The front of the car it can turn. There is a get away helicopter on the back).

Tony's parents played a big role in his literacy expansion by extending him when he showed an interest in something. At home he saw some mould on a bun and his mom allowed him to bring it to school where he showed the class. We then set up some mould experiments to observe the growth of mould in different conditions and our student teacher helped him access information from the library through encyclopaedias and fact books.

In December Tony's Mom told me that he and his brother had persisted the previous night, without help, and wrote letters to Santa. Tony was really using his literacy for a variety of purposes to meet his needs in daily life.

All four boys had difficulties focusing in modelled writing. In our writing demonstrations 'sitting still' was not a necessary requisite for focusing. There were frequent opportunities for movements in practicing 'writing' letters

and words in the air, on the carpet or on their hand as a means of keeping the group actively participating and involved in the activity. Large body movements were apparent from all the children at some point during the demonstrations.

Tony was wriggly and squirmy in modelled writing and didn't like being in the group for our morning sentence. According to his interview it was "because I can't have a chance to raise my hand - you don't ask me enough. Others go to the board more than me." He obviously felt that he didn't get enough turns and he didn't like having to wait for a turn, just as Fields discussed (1994). Yet when all the children were expected to contribute and participate, Tony was often busy looking around, touching Jane's hair or holding Trent's arm. When I asked him to spell a word he could usually do it or he confidently tried to sound it out. He was a mystery to me because he seemed to know what was going on and he actively participated despite his wriggling, fidgeting and squirming.

In late November I modelled a 'Thank You' letter on chart paper on the floor with the children in a circle. Tony was next to me and had enormous difficulty sitting still and remaining on task - and that was with the best view in the house! Instead, he was feeling my non-writing arm or my skirt or my furry sweater. I knew what it was like for children who sat next to him.

Just as Tony's writing had a slow start, so too did his reading. By mid October Tony's parents were concerned that he wasn't reading; rather that he was memorising familiar books with repetitive language patterns. Certainly he seemed to 'read' many small books from levels one to five by memorising, but a longer one like 'The Hungry Giant' was level fourteen. Could he

memorise that too? He picked out some frequently used words like 'to, in, no, the', but didn't appear to be really reading and his tracking was not accurate. The main strategy he used for tackling unknown words was 'sounding out' and when that didn't work he appealed to the listening adult for help. I suggested he try to work it out by re-reading the sentence, looking at the letters or seeing if the picture gave him any hints. Tony's perseverance with these strategies in October, was very low.

He took two familiar books each day for Home Reading and I extended him by introducing another book from the level five to eight box. Often he expressed dismay when I introduced a new one saying, "I can't read that one." I assured him I would help and I wasn't expecting him to read it alone. I was the 'scaffold' to help him gain confidence in tackling new books. Tony then protested that he had enough books and couldn't take home a third. I suggested that he take it and his Mom or Dad would help him read it.

At this point his Mom came up with a solution. She suggested he take one book each night to 'challenge' him. Tony rose to this suggestion and from then on, chose two familiar books and one harder book to work on, or to 'challenge' him.

In November he blossomed. He chose a variety of books and harder books. He varied his reading strategies to include re-reading, using picture cues and semantic cues, as well as his favourite, sounding out. His Mom had also taught him some rules such as 'when two vowels go walking, the front one does the talking', a strategy I rarely use with my grade ones. Interestingly, on December fourth, in reading 'The Whale', a level eleven book, Tony applied that rule when he came to '... eats'. He was thrilled to realise that it worked!

By December Tony was a confident reader who tackled new books and enjoyed familiar books at levels fourteen and fifteen. He was interested in non-fiction books for information on his many interests. The support from his parents was a vital ingredient in his reading development.

In late November the Learning assistant re-tested Tony on the Reading Recovery tests. Of interest to me were the Learning Assistant's comments about the testing. She said, "Tony was very wiggly. He was on and off the chair. There was lots of talk and lots of movement." Apparently he even asked to sit at a different spot at the table. This request was declined and the Learning Assistant had him continue with the Letter Identification task.

On the Word Test Tony went from reading four words out of fifteen, to reading eleven words. Of the remaining four words he came close saying 'locked' for 'look', 'with' for 'where', 'dog' for 'big' and 'lit' for 'let'. With the Writing Test Tony wrote thirteen words the first time and sixteen words the second time. Like Nicholas, there was a difference in the words that he wrote. More difficult words were attempted after the common ones of mom, mommy, dad, daddy and his sibling's name. Tony wrote 'and, an, exit, jump, Mr, dog', then came close in 'my' for 'me', 'shy' for 'she' and 'fol' for 'fall'. The Learning Assistant made further comments about Tony saying, "Eyes all over room" and "Aware of environmental print". Tony was very wriggly and squirmy in a one to one situation, on a chair at a table where he had lots of space. The results were clear too - he was learning, despite all the movement and wriggling!

On December eleventh Tony wrote a sentence in his Journal about things he and his friends had brought for 'show and tell' and I noted several

conventions of writing in his work. He left spaces between words, used capitals, apostrophes, a period and spelled many words correctly (see figure 16). Tony had come along way!

11-12-95
 I like one ^{display} desided
 made ^{out} ^{of} ~~our~~ ~~my~~ ~~my~~
 Dustin's ^{teapot} ~~teapot~~
 and my troll
 and Gerry's fossil
 and Jordan's cork.

Figure 16

(I like our display made out of Dustin's teapot and my troll and Gerry's fossil and Jordan's cork)

A week before Christmas Tony's Journal entry revealed how he was tying together his literacy and home and school experiences. His Journal entry read:

I like my sgrl and jeprody. hers the frst qweshten wuk kerdr has a fat hed?

(I like my squirrel and Jeopardy. Here's the first question. What character has a fat head?)

He had the class in hysterics as he read his questions out based on television shows. Tony had expanded his literacy horizons yet again.

Implications for Teachers

In closely observing the class and specifically, the four boys in group literacy activities, I saw features of the classroom that affected the children's learning. It made me aware that teachers need to constantly reflect on the activities they provide for students. As Delena indicated, we shouldn't always locate the problem in the child. The teacher needs to look at the task and the situation in the classroom too (1992).

Shared reading

In watching the class during shared reading of Big Books and in talking to them about the activity, I realised that several changes needed to occur for the learning experiences to be more effective for the students.

1. The reading must be expressive. Dramatic reading gets them even more involved and it becomes more fun for all.
2. The pace must move right along to maintain their interest - a 'snappy pace' in Holdaway's words (1979). This was obvious one morning when the teacher let the reading drag with only the better readers involved in trying to read the text (and she let them do this for a few pages). The other children lost interest, became restless and chatted to peers. The amount of fiddling, touching and moving around increased greatly.
3. The teacher needs to 'scaffold' the group by reading parts when help is necessary but letting the children read along themselves when they can.
4. There was a difference in group participation when the teacher gave specific feedback about the reading, e.g. Ms. Thomas said, 'I like the way Mandy is reading today. I can hear her really well.' After that comment more

children joined in, probably hoping for their own personal encouragement. Another example was when she said, 'I saw Jack following every word on that page. He was concentrating well and trying very hard.' Again, more children followed the words and joined in reading the book.

5. There was active participation when *all* the children were involved in the reading. In 'Hattie and the Fox', there is repetitive dialogue. The teacher had the girls read the narrative and the boys speak the dialogue so all were actively participating. The roles were reversed for variety. Another example was in 'Order in the Court' when half the class was first reader and the other half was the echo. On another occasion Ms Thomas said, 'Let's see if we can use spooky voices for reading 'In a Dark, Dark Wood' today' and the children responded enthusiastically with spooky voices.

In reading Big Books and charts it must be easy for all the group to see the text. In September the Big Book stand in my classroom had the ledge at a level that was perfect for the children in the front and the second row. The children in the middle and at the back couldn't see clearly unless they were dodging heads or kneeling up on their knees. For those children who had difficulty focusing anyway, this was a hindrance they did not need. On observing Ms. Thomas during shared reading it was easy to see the problem. We added a ledge half way up the Big Book stand so the books were higher and easier for everyone to see - even if the print was on the bottom of the page. This eliminated the problem of some children not being able to see, thus removing one of the reasons for not focusing in reading Big Books.

The same principle applied to reading charts from the chart stand. The longer chart paper was difficult to see at the back of the group if the printing

was at the bottom of the page. To solve the problem we wrote on the top half of the chart paper and had children's drawings of the text, on the bottom half. We also used wide chart paper with the print at the top.

Another problem arose when children were too close to the charts because their necks became stiff from looking upwards. A tall girl was sitting in the front one day and after seven charts she stopped focusing. She started fiddling with her shoes and looking at pictures on the wall at her eye level. On asking what the problem was she said her neck was hurting from looking up all the time. She solved the problem by moving to the back and I learned again the importance of listening to children.

Modelled writing

Some children have difficulty focusing in this literacy activity. Like the shared reading, I keep a 'snappy' pace and try to involve all the children in spelling words, questioning about sounds and letters, 'writing' words and letters in the air and on the carpet in front of them.

I talk to the children about them taking responsibility for their own learning and having them understand that they do have a responsibility to listen, to look and to actively participate. I also have the writing relevant and interesting to the class.

Chapter Five

Conclusions

Nicholas and James showed me that by sitting fairly still and focusing on literacy activities they absorbed information and transferred it to their own literacy development

Daniel showed me that although he sits fairly still, his eyes and mind don't necessarily focus on the task at hand.

Tony showed me that wriggling in group literacy activities does not necessarily mean that he is not focused.

As teachers therefore we cannot assume that because students are fairly still they are necessarily focused, or that because they are wriggling, they are not focused.

What does this mean for teachers?

Teachers need to know their students well to accommodate *all* students in their learning. For the children who are fairly still but not focused, teachers must bring them into the interaction to increase their participation, rather than let them sit and not participate.

We can allow the wriggling student some space to move, so as not to unduly affect others, but we must include him in the class interactions, to keep him involved because he may be taking something in.

Teachers need to ask their students about participating in activities to find out what works for different students as seen in Tony's comments about why he chose to sit near the back.

We need to discuss with students reasons for doing activities - to have them understand, for example, why following the enlarged text is important in reading charts and Big Books.

We need to encourage all students with specific and positive comments about their work and behaviour. In acknowledging what children CAN do and with flexible programming, we can provide opportunities for students to work on their own interests.

We must try to have work that is meaningful, relevant and personal for students. Journal writing was personal about things of interest to each student. Charts and modelled writing were related to the class and/or individual students so they were meaningful. Daniel copied his address for writing because it was relevant to him. Tony's literacy increased when he saw personal uses for reading and writing as in his letters to Santa and the Raptors. Nicholas and James wrote notes and letters at home and by sharing them with the class there was an audience for their writing. I responded to their notes ensuring that the communication was personal and meaningful. Often the boys couldn't read the letters - but they soon found someone who could. And they always took the letters home to share with their parents.

We need to acknowledge children's writing and drawing from home. In sharing these samples with the class we are recognising the effort put into the task and expressing pride in the work. We are also showing classmates what their peers can do; this may inspire others to try. Home literacy was a critical factor in developing the boys literacy because the children saw demonstrations of reading and writing in their daily lives. They experienced connections between literacy at home and literacy at school. Literacy was literacy - not 'home activities' and school 'reading and writing'.

It would be interesting to do a similar study focusing on all students in the group who frequently wriggle. Rather than observing four boys at different levels of literacy, one could observe wrigglers in the class and follow their focus in group activities and literacy development. This could verify if other wriggling students were like Tony, that is, they learn despite their wriggling and frequent movement. Alternatively there may be evidence that movement hinders their learning.

According to this study the boys' focus in group literacy activities had an effect on their literacy development. Home literacy however, had a powerful effect too. With schools and parents working together to develop the literacy of students, the chances of students becoming literate, and using and enjoying that literacy, are greatly enhanced.

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Appendix 1

	WHAT DO THE CHILDREN DO IN GROUP LITERACY ACTIVITIES?												
	Sits fairly still	Looks at bk/bd	Follows print	Fiddles, etc.	Talks to peers	Lg. bdy movt.	Looks around	Reads along	Participates	Contrib. to disc	Seem to attend		
AmyLynn													
Cody													
Dustin													
Esther													
Gerry													
Grant													
Ian													
Jo-Anna													
Jonathan													
Jordan													
Kelly													
Matthew													
Max													
Nina													
Ronnie													
Samuel													
Sandy													
Sarkis													
Sean													
Sheri													
Sierra													
Stacey													
Troy													

Appendix 2

What do the boys do during group literacy activities?							
	Story	Big Book	Video	Charts	Model sentence	Calendar	Other
Location							
Sits fairly still							
Fidgets/fiddles							
Large body movt.							
Talks to peers							
Looks around							
Seems to attend							
Participates							
Comments							

Appendix 3

INTERVIEW FOR CHILDREN

Questions for children about group literacy activities

1. Do you like being in the group for calendar time?

Why ?

Why not?

2. Do you like being in the group for Big Books?

Why?

Why not?

3. Do you like being in the group for shared reading?

Why?

Why not?

4. Do you like being in the group for our morning sentence?

Why?

Why not?

Appendix 4

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PARENTS

Questions for parents about their child's concentration on literacy tasks at home

1. Do you read to your child at home?
If so, how often?

2. What factors determine if there will be a storytime?

3. Where does he sit for a story?
Is he wiggly or still when you read to him?

4. How does he usually react to storytime? Give details

5. Does he follow the print with his eyes and/or with his finger?

6. Does he talk with you during the story?
If so, is his talk related to the story or does he go off on tangents?

7. Does he concentrate on the story? Give details.

8. Does he seem to enjoy most stories?
What are some of his favourite books?

9. How long does storytime usually last?

10. Does he stay until the story is finished?

11. Does he choose to 'look at' or 'read' books on his own? Give details

12. Does he choose books in his 'free' times? If not, what toys does he choose?

13. What toys or activities does he play with for the longest periods of time at home?

14. Does he choose to write at home? Give details.

15. Does he choose to draw at home? Give details.

16. Do you talk about the alphabet letters and sounds at home? Give details

17. Approximately how much T.V. and/or videos, does he watch in a week?

18. Does he concentrate when watching T.V. and/or videos? Give details.

19. What activities at home do you think your child concentrates best at?

20. Please add any comments about your child's concentration or literacy activities.

Appendix 5

A	F	K	P	W	Z
---	---	---	---	---	---

B	H	O	J	U	
---	---	---	---	---	--

C	Y	L	Q	M	
---	---	---	---	---	--

D	N	S	X	I	
---	---	---	---	---	--

E	G	R	V	T	
---	---	---	---	---	--

a	f	k	p	w	z
---	---	---	---	---	---

b	h	o	j	u	a
---	---	---	---	---	---

c	y	l	q	m	
---	---	---	---	---	--

d	n	s	x	i	
---	---	---	---	---	--

e	g	r	v	t	g
---	---	---	---	---	---

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LETTER IDENTIFICATION SCORE SHEET

Name: _____ Age: _____

Recorder: _____ Date of Birth: _____

Date: _____

TEST SCORE: /54

STANINE GROUP:

	A	S	Word	I.R.		A	S	Word	I.R.
A					a				
F					f				
K					k				
P					p				
W					w				
Z					z				
B					b				
H					h				
O					o				
J					j				
U					u				
					a				
C					c				
Y					y				
L					l				
Q					q				
M					m				
D					d				
N					n				
S					s				
X					x				
I					i				
E					e				
G					g				
R					r				
V					v				
T					t				
					g				
TOTALS									

Confusions:

Letters Unknown:

Comment:

Recording:

- A Alphabet response:
tick (check)
- S Letter sound response:
tick (check)
- Word Record the word the
child gives
- IR Incorrect response:
Record what the
child says

TOTAL SCORE

WORD TEST SCORE SHEET

Use any **one** list of words.

Date: _____

Name: _____ Age: _____

TEST SCORE: /15

Recorder: _____ Date of Birth: _____

STANINE GROUP:

Record incorrect responses beside word

LIST A	LIST B	LIST C
I	and	Father
Mother	to	come
are	will	for
here	look	a
me	he	you
shouted	up	at
am	like	school
with	in	went
car	where	get
children	Mr	we
help	going	they
not	big	ready
too	go	this
meet	let	boys
away	on	please

COMMENT:

WRITING VOCABULARY TEST SHEET

Name: _____ Age: _____

Date: _____

Recorder: _____ Date of Birth: _____

TEST SCORE:

STANINE GROUP:

(Fold heading under before child uses sheet)

COMMENT